Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas

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Supplemental Species Accounts

by Troy E. Corman

The following forty-seven species are discussed under three fairly distinct categories. *Rare and Local Nesting Species* were confirmed breeding in Arizona during the atlas period, but were noted in only one or two localities in the state. *Possible and Probable Nesting Species* were also encountered in Arizona during the atlas period in appropriate nesting habitat during the proper season, but confirmed nesting activity was not reported. As noted earlier, eight of these species had previously been documented nesting in Arizona. *Historical Nesting Species* had been reported nesting in the state prior to the atlas project (1993), but were not suspected of nesting in Arizona during the atlas period.

RARE AND LOCAL NESTING SPECIES

WHITE-FACED IBIS *Plegadis chihi*

A common migrant and an increasing local winter resident in Arizona, the White-faced Ibis can be observed at almost any open, shallow water source in the state during migration. Wetlands, flooded fields, lakeshores, and various ponds appear to be especially favored for foraging and loafing. Spring migration begins in March and continues through much of May, with stragglers and nonbreeding individuals noted locally throughout the summer. A few southbound migrants begin to appear by at least early July, with peak passage in August and September. Late-migrating flocks are noted well into November in southern and western Arizona.

Prior to the atlas project, the White-faced Ibis was suspected of occasionally nesting in Arizona. White-faced Ibis nests with eggs were reported by a canoeist among the tules at Mormon Lake, southeast of Flagstaff, in 1992. Unfamiliar with the species, the observer described large, dark greenish-bronze birds with long curved bills, further describing the eggs as having an attractive blue-green color. Unfortunately, word of this observation came too late to be followed up and verified. This was one year before the initiation of atlas surveys. During the early atlas period, White-faced Ibises were noted at this lake in June on several occasions, but nesting was not documented. Water levels may not have been adequate at this shallow lake throughout much of the atlas period, which eventually dried up completely during the final few years of the project.

White-faced Ibis were finally confirmed as a nesting species in Arizona on June 21, 2000, when U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists B. Zaun and K. King discovered a nesting colony within an island of bulrush. The location was on Cibola Lake, a backwater of the Colorado River within Cibola National Wildlife Refuge. The elevation of the lake is approximately 220 ft (67 m). Based on first hatching, egg laying probably began around June 14. Although approximately 1500 ibis used this 40 by 40 m stand of bulrush as a nightly roost site, only about seventy-five nests were observed. Nests were made entirely of bulrush stems, which were attached to standing bulrush 2–4 ft (0.6–1.2 m) above the water. Nineteen nests located along the perimeter were flagged and monitored weekly. The eggs began to hatch around 7 July. White-faced Ibises did not nest at this location the following year.

At the southern edge of their nesting range, near-optimal habitat conditions apparently must be met before White-faced Ibises attempt to breed in Arizona. Throughout much of the state, water levels at many of the potential nesting locations fluctuate greatly from one year to the next creating unreliable foraging and nesting habitat. Therefore, the White-faced Ibis will likely remain a very local and irregular nesting species in Arizona.

MOUNTAIN PLOVER *Charadrius montanus*

Primarily known as a rare to uncommon and very local fall and winter resident in southern Arizona, Mountain Plovers are typically observed in small flocks inhabiting barren agricultural fields or turf farms from late August to early March. However, during the atlas period, the open, shortgrass prairies of east-central Arizona were found to harbor a local nesting population of Mountain Plovers. First suspected of nesting in the state when small flocks were noted in August 1914 northeast of Springerville (Phillips et al. 1964). However, Tolle (1976) speculated that these birds might have been early migrants. Suspicions were brought to the forefront again when a nest with eggs of these plovers was found on 12 June 1978 in New Mexico, only 7 mi (11 km) from the Arizona border and approximately 23 mi (37 km) east of Springerville (Johnson and Spicer 1981). In a region of the state that has received very little biological attention, Johnson and Spicer further speculated Mountain Plovers might be scattered but locally common breeders in the shortgrass prairies from the Springerville region north and west to Holbrook.

Atlasers observed four adult Mountain Plovers in the grasslands just northwest of Springerville on 30 June 1994, but no further nesting evidence was noted. In late spring 1996, specific surveys for the Mountain Plover were conducted in the area, and the species was finally confirmed breeding in Arizona when a nest with three eggs was dis-

covered and photographed on 15 May. At an elevation of approximately 6860 ft (2091 m), the nest and additional pairs were observed in heavily grazed, gently rolling areas dominated by a mosaic of bare earth, gravel, and short hummocks of blue grama. Nesting was also suspected in central Navajo County on Navajo tribal land, when atlasers observed a pair of Mountain Plovers between Dilkon and Winslow on 14 June 1995 at an elevation of 5360 ft (1634 m).

As Johnson and Spicer (1981) previously suggested, specific spring surveys for Mountain Plovers may reveal them to be a more widespread nesting species in Arizona than these few atlas records suggest. Most of the suitable habitat in southern Navajo and Apache counties remains unsurveyed because of private- and state-leased-land access restrictions. Most of the open grasslands in this area are heavily grazed and dominated by blue grama, which is characteristic of Mountain Plover breeding habitat throughout the Great Plains (Graul and Webster 1976).

LONG-BILLED CURLEW *Numenius americanus*

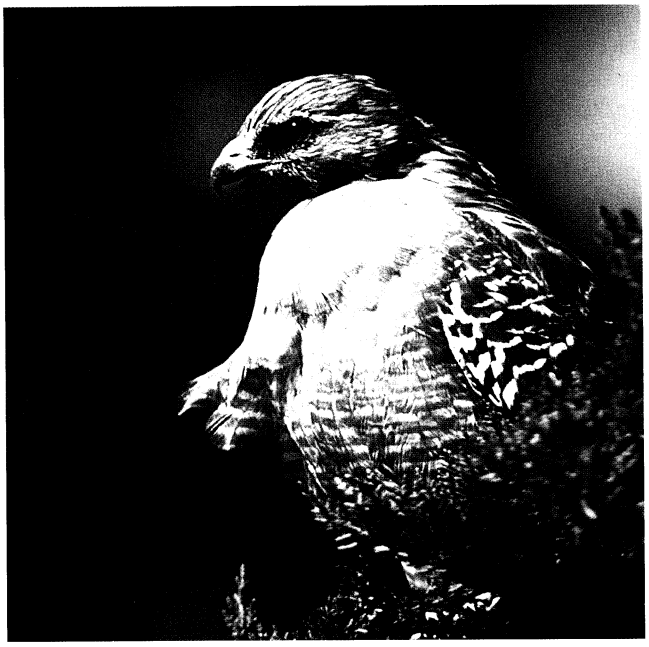
Prior to the atlas project, Long-billed Curlews were considered uncommon to locally common migrants in Arizona. Most records are concentrated primarily between mid-March to early May and then again from early July to late September. Observations of wintering flocks of Long-billed Curlews in agricultural areas of southern Arizona have also steadily increased.

During the atlas period, Long-billed Curlews were a rather unexpected addition to Arizona's nesting avifauna. On 21 June 1993, two adults with three half-grown young were observed in grasslands just west of Eagar, Apache County (D. Jones, personal communication). The elevation at this location was approximately 7140 ft (2176 m). Periodic summer observation of Long-billed Curlews in the area north to the Springerville-Eagar airport continued well into the atlas period. This included three adult curlews observed mobbing a Ferruginous Hawk flying over the grasslands near the airport. In 1915, Goldman (1926) observed a Long-billed Curlew at Big Lake in southern Apache County on 25 June. Atlasers also observed a pair of these curlews in the alpine grasslands north of Big Lake on 19 June 1993. This date suggests another possible nesting location in the White Mountains region. However, southbound migrants are regularly observed by late June in Arizona, and without additional breeding evidence these potential nesting records will remain questionable.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK *Buteo lineatus*

Typically a very rare vagrant or migrant in Arizona, Red-shouldered Hawks are most often observed in or near riparian woodlands containing tall cottonwood, willow, and/or sycamore trees. Most observations are in fall and winter, but individuals have lingered well into the spring and occasionally throughout the summer.

Red-shouldered Hawks had been noted nesting in Arizona only one other time prior to the atlas project. In late spring 1970, a pair was discovered with a nest and two



JIM BURNS

Red-shouldered Hawk

young in a Fremont cottonwood near the northern edge of Mittry Lake north of Yuma (Glinski 1982). The elevation at this location is approximately 120 ft (37 m). Arizona's second nesting attempt occurred during the atlas. Beginning on 22 April 1999, a Red-shouldered Hawk was periodically noted at the Hassayampa River Preserve near Wickenburg, Maricopa County, at an elevation of 1940 ft (591 m). By the spring of 2000, a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks was confirmed at this location, and nest construction in a cottonwood was observed by 20 April. The pair was observed incubating for over a month during late May and June. However, by late June, adult attendance at the nest had waned and the attempt was determined to have failed (R. Glinski, personal communication). This pair attempted to nest again in 2001, but the outcome was unknown.

The only other potential nesting record during the atlas period was of a Red-shouldered Hawk observed on 24 May near the confluence of Beaver Dam Wash and the Virgin River near Littlefield in extreme northwestern Arizona. Evidence suggests that California populations of the western race *elegans* of the Red-shouldered Hawk have increased and expanded into areas they had not inhabited historically (Wilbur 1975). This may help explain the steady increase of observations of this raptor in Arizona during the past several decades, and additional nesting attempts in the state are to be expected.

RINGED TURTLE-DOVE *Streptopelia risoria*

A common caged bird, the exotic Ringed Turtle-Dove has been found nesting locally in a few Tucson and Phoenix neighborhoods since at least the 1970s (Monson and Phillips 1981). These exotic doves apparently do not thrive well in the wild, and all populations have remained small, very local, and heavily reliant on nearby feeding stations.

Ringed Turtle-Doves went unreported by atlasers in the Tucson area, where Monson and Phillips (1981) noted